



REPORT TO THE PEOPLE OF TEXAS

GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

The promise of the future knows no bounds, and the Lone Star State remains the best place to raise a family, build a business and create greater opportunity for all.

The true secret to the robust strength and resilience of the Texas economy is our greatest natural resource: the hardworking people of Texas. It is a privilege to serve the people of this great state, working by your side to ensure the future is bigger and brighter for generations to come.



Greg Abbott

2016



**“Without dreams,
there is no need to work.**

**Without work, there is
no need to dream.**

Success requires big **aspirations**
to dream great things and
the **work ethic** to achieve them.”

**Governor Abbott’s remarks to high school students attending
the Hispanic Engineering, Science and Technology Week
at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, October 2015**

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On the cover: Governor Abbott addressing business leaders at the San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Congratulating a graduating class of Texas Department of Public Safety recruits. Promoting the more than 280 Texas-based companies listed on the New York Stock Exchange during an economic development trip to New York. Celebrating the future of Texas with bright young students at Emerson Elementary School in Houston.



The only thing bigger than Texas today is Texas tomorrow.

In this first Report to the People, we look back at an incredible year. We celebrated so many Texas heroes in 2015: our law enforcement officers and first responders, our men and women in uniform, our students and educators, the entrepreneurs and innovators building their businesses and growing new jobs—and everyday Texans who went to work and to school each day, all to make tomorrow brighter for their families, their community, our state and our nation.

Whether tested by fire or flood, by acts of nature or acts of madmen, Texans came together this year: Neighbors helped neighbors, and strangers helped new friends. We saw again and again the strength of character of our Texas family as we paused to remember lives lost and to celebrate lives saved.

While traveling across this state, it's been an honor to shake your hand, look you in the eye and listen to your concerns and hopes for the future. As Texans, we know the bonds we share transcend our differences. We look to the horizon and see opportunities unbounded. We look to our families and see cultures blended and strong. And we look to the future and ask: How do we give all of our children lives worthy of their promise?

Children born last year will graduate from college in 2036, the bicentennial year of our state's independence. What kind of Texas will they inherit? That is our shared focus: building an even stronger Texas for tomorrow.

Today, Texas remains the land of opportunity, a bright beacon for the nation. Our economy is diverse

and our workforce strong. Despite the drop in oil prices, jobs are growing here and families are growing here.

The Texas model is proof that limited government encourages unlimited opportunity. Less government, low taxes, smarter regulations and right-to-work laws—these are the pro-growth economic policies that help free enterprise flourish in Texas.

Going forward, we will continue to take a strong stand against known threats—the drug cartels, transnational gangs and human smuggling and trafficking operations—and against unknown threats from those who seek to wage war against our freedoms and our liberty.

It is a privilege to serve the people of this great state, working by your side to ensure the future is bigger and brighter for generations to come. The First Lady and I thank you for your letters, your calls and your prayers.

May God bless you all in the year ahead, and may He forever bless the great State of Texas.

Private-sector

JOBS added:

TEXAS is **#1**

with over **1.85 million jobs** added in the last 10 years

Source: BLS, seasonally adjusted CES, as of December 2015

Texas population **GREW**
by more than

6 million

since 2000,

MORE than any other state

Source: US Census Bureau, most current data, July 2000-July 2014

Small, mid-size and large cities:

Fastest-growing economies

ALL in Texas; 9 of Top 10 overall

Source: WalletHub, 2015

Unemployment in Texas:

4.7 %

At or **BELOW** the national average for 108 consecutive months

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Texas, as of December 2015

Nation's top CEOs name
Texas **BEST** State for Business

#1

for **11 years** in a row

Source: Chief Executive magazine annual survey, 2015

Women-owned businesses
in Texas **GROWING**

2x faster

than **ALL** businesses nationwide

Source: 2015 State of Women-Owned Businesses, American Express OPEN and Womenable

Texas on-time high school graduation rate:

88.3 %

ALL-TIME HIGH; again surpassing the national average of 82.3%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2014 Class

College degrees and certificates awarded in Texas

up **61 %**

since 2000; **doubling** enrollment of African-Americans and Hispanics

Source: THECB, 2000 to 2014

Building an even stronger Texas

After taking the oath of office as governor of this great state,

I promised to improve our public and higher education systems, build new roads, secure our border and chart a course that keeps Texas a beacon of individual liberty and economic opportunity.

A bold, ambitious agenda—that’s what observers called the top priorities I outlined for the 84th Legislative Session. One year later, I’m happy to report that we are following through on those promises and much more.

EARLY EDUCATION

With strong bipartisan support in both the Texas House and Senate, we passed a critical legislative package strengthening the foundation on which our children will build their future.

■ **School districts are awarded** more resources to improve pre-kindergarten program quality while being held more accountable for student success.

■ **Teachers now have access** to new specialized training to help more of our children master critical reading and math skills in kindergarten through fifth grade.

■ **Parents are being empowered** with clear and concise school performance information so they can make the best educational decisions for their children.

HIGHER EDUCATION

To make college more affordable for more Texas families:

■ **More college credits earned** early in high school are counted.

■ **College credits transfer more** easily between institutions.

■ **Career and technical training** pathways are cleared of obstacles to meet the growing demand in high-skilled technical fields.



“Education is the key that opens the door to economic opportunity.” Governor Abbott honoring 2015 National Teacher of the Year Shanna Peebles from Palo Duro High School in Amarillo. Celebrating the first day of school with students at Zavala Elementary in Austin. Announcing a major grant by the United Health Foundation to The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine in Edinburg.

“Texas is the land of opportunity,
where the improbable becomes the possible...
The future is yet to be written—all of our children should be its authors.”

Governor Abbott's remarks to the Fort Worth Metropolitan Black Chamber of Commerce, June 2015

And because technologies not yet invented will drive continuing innovation in higher education and future job growth:

- **We've committed \$450 million** to elevate our university research programs and to attract even more nationally recognized researchers and Nobel Laureates.

ROADS

To keep Texas commerce and commuters moving:

- **We're adding nearly \$4 billion** more for roads without raising tolls, fees, debt or taxes.

TAX RELIEF

We're freeing Texas businesses and homeowners to invest more of their own money in new jobs, higher wages and stimulating the Texas economy.

- **We cut the business franchise tax by 25 percent.**

- **And we're providing tax relief** to homeowners by increasing the homestead exemption to \$25,000 while holding local taxing districts more accountable to voters as first steps toward lasting relief.

BORDER SECURITY

To address the threats posed to communities large and small all across our state due to the federal government's failure to secure our nation's border:

- **We are nearly doubling our** investment in border security, allocating approximately \$800 million for added public safety personnel, technology and local resources.

FREEDOM

Thanks to all of my partners in the 84th Legislature, much more was accomplished this session.

- **We're keeping our state strong** and prosperous with a budget below the state's spending limit.

- **We're removing barriers to job** growth to unleash the power of entrepreneurs and innovators.

- **And we're securing Texans'** freedom to aspire.

I invite you to read more in this report about all we accomplished together in 2015. And I look forward to the successes to come as we build an even stronger Texas for tomorrow.



“While other states are raising taxes, we just slashed the business franchise tax by 25 percent.” Governor Abbott and the First Lady welcoming guests to a Governor's Commission for Women luncheon honoring women serving in the 84th Texas Legislature. Traveling to Mexico on his first international trip to strengthen trade relations. Touring the 1.25-million-square-foot Amazon Fulfillment Center in Schertz.

Spurring continuing economic expansion

Job creation is the lifeblood of our state; our long history of job growth equates to more opportunity for all Texans.

Governor Abbott accepting a personalized welding helmet at Texas State Technical College's 50th Anniversary Celebration.



► **VIDEO LINKS:**

[Governor Abbott Lures Businesses To Texas From NY](#)

[Governor Abbott Goes To Mexico](#)

[Governor Abbott Goes To Cuba](#)

Because of the robust strength, resilience and diversity of the Texas economy—the 12th largest in the world—jobs are growing and employment is holding steady, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, despite losses in the energy sector driven by the drop in oil prices. In fact, manufacturing accelerated in the last quarter of 2015.

JOB GROWTH REPORT

■ **Texas employers added** 166,900 non-farm jobs in 2015 across nine of 11 major industries.

■ **Job creators include 2.4 million** small businesses and 54 Fortune 500 companies attracted by our work-ready job force of 13 million.

■ **Texas still leads in energy** production and exports; we're also among the top states for technology, manufacturing and healthcare jobs.

■ **Even as our population grows,** the unemployment rate has been at or below the national average for 108 consecutive months.

■ **In fact, if not for Texas' record** job growth, the nation as a whole would have experienced a net job loss since the 2007 recession.

BUSINESS CLIMATE REPORT

When businesses succeed here, Texans succeed.

■ **Texas ranks first for economic** climate according to Forbes.

■ **Texas is again ranked the best** state for business—the 11th year in a row—in Chief Executive’s survey of the nation’s top CEOs.

■ **Texas is the No. 1 state** for foreign and domestic investments as noted in IBM’s 2015 Global Location Trends Facts & Figures.

■ **Texas is also the top performing** state for qualified capital investments for the third year in a row and the sixth year since 2004. According to Site Selection magazine, each of the 689 business facility projects completed in 2014 represents a minimum investment of \$1 million.

■ **Showing the breadth of these** capital investments, Odessa, Houston and Dallas were also named among the top metro areas in the nation for facility growth.

■ **And Houston ranks third** in the nation, behind only New York and Los Angeles, for minority-owned startups.

EXPANDING THE ECONOMY

To spur continuing job growth:

■ **I restructured key divisions** in my office to increase the focus on economic development.

■ **While Texas imposes no** personal or corporate income tax, we just cut taxes by nearly \$4 billion to further stimulate job creation and the Texas economy.

■ **We are also speeding up** permitting processes and have eliminated occupational licensing fees for more than 600,000 Texas professionals.

2015 CORPORATE RELOCATIONS AND EXPANSIONS

Attracted by Governor Abbott’s pro-growth economic policies and our work-ready job force, even more businesses and jobs came to Texas this year, including:

■ **Kubota Tractor**—from Torrance, Calif., to Grapevine, a \$51 million capital investment creating 344 new jobs;

■ **Farmer Brothers**—also from Torrance, Calif., to Grapevine, a \$65 million investment bringing 350 new jobs;

■ **LiveOps**—from Redwood City, Calif., to Cedar Park, a \$5 million capital investment in Texas adding 155 new jobs;

■ **GM Financial**—expanding operations here, building a servicing center in San Antonio, a \$20 million investment creating 490 jobs;

■ **Facebook**—building a data center in Fort Worth representing more than \$500 million in capital investment and 40-plus full-time jobs;

■ **GRI Renewable Industries** of Spain—building a manufacturing plant in Amarillo, a \$41 million investment creating 300 new jobs;

■ **Amazon**—building its fifth center in San Marcos, investing more than \$400 million to date and creating over 3,500 jobs in the state;

■ **CGT U.S. Limited**—constructing a new manufacturing facility in New Braunfels, an \$80 million investment creating at least 275 jobs;

■ **Apple, Oracle, Google and Microsoft**—expanding their corporate presence and jobs in Texas’ tech innovation corridor.

SPOTLIGHT:

WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

Women business owners are a powerful economic force, and my goal is to make Texas the most welcoming home for them.

Women in business are looking for the same opportunities as all entrepreneurs—more access to capital, fewer barriers to entry and greater freedom to grow. Texas offers more of those growth opportunities.

■ **We’re also connecting Texas** businesswomen to resources through the Governor’s Commission for Women.

■ **And I proudly approved \$2.2** million in funding to establish a Center for Women in Business at Texas Woman’s University in Denton to provide more of the tools needed to succeed.

“Freedom is the intangible but very real promise of Texas that encourages businesses to grow here.”



Governor Abbott celebrating with members of the National Association of Women Business Owners at the national convention and gala in San Antonio. Sharing his bold vision for continuing innovation and job growth with the Greater Houston Partnership. Breaking ground on a new Facebook data center in Fort Worth to be powered by 100 percent renewable energy.

Unlocking opportunity for more Texas children

Students learning in our classrooms today are more than the future workforce of Texas.

They are also the future job creators of America.

▶ VIDEO LINKS:

[Governor Abbott On The Importance Of Early Education](#)

Texas public schools educate more than 5.2 million students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade—that’s more than 1 in 10 of all public school students in the U.S.

In just the last decade, enrollment has grown 19 percent, and more than 17 percent of our students receive bilingual or English as a Second Language instruction.

The gains we make here matter not only for our children’s future, but also for the nation’s.

■ **That’s why I want our schools to be the best in America.**

■ **I want every child reading at grade level by third grade.**

■ **And I want every high school diploma to truly certify a student is career-ready or college-ready.**

EDUCATION GAINS REPORT

Because of our dedicated teachers and involved parents, more of our students are succeeding.

■ **Four of the top 10 high schools** and the highest-ranked high school in the nation are in Texas, according to U.S. News.

■ **Our 88.3 percent on-time high school graduation rate** is at an all-time high, placing us in the top five nationally.

■ **And notably, our Hispanic and African-American students** are graduating at the second-highest rate of their peers in all states.

As more of our students are college-bound:

■ **The number of Texas high school students taking Advanced Placement exams** has doubled,



“Teaching is more than just a job—it’s a calling and a commitment.” Governor Abbott visiting the School at St. George Place to present his education plan to Houston ISD leaders. Signing his gold-standard pre-kindergarten program into law. Celebrating the success of public charter schools with students, teachers and parents at a rally on the south steps of the Texas Capitol.

“We must not rest. We must not relent.
We can be No. 1 in education if we apply the same tenacity and
commitment to education as we do to job creation.”

Governor Abbott’s State of the State Address, February 2015

and they are more likely to qualify for college credit when compared to the national average.

■ **More of our students are also** taking the SAT and ACT college entrance exams, including double-digit gains for the number of Hispanic and African-American students participating.

We’re also seeing encouraging gains by our elementary and middle school students.

■ **Texas students have jumped** from 27th to 11th in the nation in fourth grade math in two years.

■ **African-American students in** Texas are second in the nation in fourth grade math; our Hispanic students are fourth.

■ **Our students also exceed** the national average in eighth grade math.

UNLOCKING MORE OPPORTUNITY

To build a stronger early education foundation in reading and math, we’re providing our educators with new resources.

■ **High-quality pre-kindergarten** increases per-student funding for districts voluntarily adopting more rigorous instruction guidelines,



“Your lives will not be defined by how you are challenged, but by how you respond to those challenges.” Governor Abbott congratulating the class of 2015 at his alma mater, Duncanville High School. (Photo courtesy of Duncanville ISD.)

teacher qualifications and parental engagement measures.

■ **Reading Excellence Teams** offer in-classroom skills coaching for K-3 reading teachers.

■ **Literacy Achievement Academies** provide intensive face-to-face training in the summer with an innovative reading, writing and technology curriculum for K-3 teachers.

■ **Math and Technology Achievement Academies** offer advanced instruction for K-3 math teachers so our students can compete for the more than one million new STEM-related jobs.

■ **Reading-to-Learn Academies** offer educators in grades 4 and 5 curriculum-focused teaching strategies to improve student comprehension across subjects.

■ **And to increase transparency** and give parents the information they deserve, districts will provide A through F performance ratings for each campus.

With parents, educators and communities working together, we will build a foundation of excellence for all of our children.

Learning to earn for the future

Texas colleges and universities are vital centers for developing new knowledge, where groundbreaking innovations are born that drive our state's economy and improve quality of life for all Texans.

► **VIDEO LINKS:**

[Governor Abbott On Making Higher Education More Affordable](#)

[Governor Abbott Elevates Higher Education in Texas](#)

A skilled, educated workforce is a competitive advantage—as is a degree from one of the leading institutions of higher education in Texas.

HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT

More than 1.6 million students are currently enrolled in Texas public colleges and universities.

- **With a sharpening focus on performance and outcomes,** more than 2.6 million undergraduate credentials have been awarded since 2000.
- **Our six-year college graduation rate** is at 60.5 percent, up from 49.6 percent in 2000.
- **Community college completion rates** are up 179 percent; certificate awards have increased 107 percent.
- **And we've doubled enrollment** of Hispanic and African-American students in Texas.

LEARNING TO EARN MORE

We need more students in Texas advancing up the ladder of success—whether the next step is career and technical training, a community college, the military or an academic degree program.

That's why we passed laws that help more students graduate on time with less debt.

■ **Advanced Placement scores** of 3 or higher earned in high school now qualify for college credit in Texas public colleges and universities, saving students and families thousands in tuition costs.

■ **Core courses are now more** consistently transferable between institutions so students don't waste time and money repeating classes they've already passed.

■ **Community college class** scheduling is now more predictable for students attending part-time while working to pay tuition—with morning, afternoon and evening class blocks.

And to advance higher education and fuel economic development:

■ **We are making a strategic** investment of \$450 million to elevate the national research standings of our public colleges and universities.

■ **This includes matching funds** from the new Governor's University Research Initiative to help our universities recruit even more Nobel Laureates and National Academy members who will partner with the private sector to develop ideas that transform the next generation.

“We must make college more affordable and accessible.
We must better prepare our students for real-life workforce needs.”

Governor Abbott’s State of the State Address, February 2015

SPOTLIGHT: 60x30TX

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s 60x30TX Plan will also help take Texas to the next level.

■ **By 2030, 60 percent of Texans** ages 25-34 will have earned a certificate or degree.

■ **All graduates from public** higher education institutions will have completed programs with identified marketable skills.

■ **And undergraduate loan debt** will not exceed 60 percent of first-year wages for graduates of Texas public institutions.

But 60x30TX is about more than numbers. It’s about creating even more opportunity for more Texans. When we meet these goals, Texas will be the undisputed center for innovation and intellectual capital.

ACCELERATED DEGREE PROGRAM FOR VETERANS

The new Veteran Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree program at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center is the future of higher education—offering online access, competency-based evaluation and credit for previous education and training.

Started with a seed grant from the Texas Workforce Commission’s Credit for Heroes program, the VBSN program will put medically experienced military veterans on a path to pursue a bachelor’s degree in nursing without having to start over in training.

If the rigorous training that military medics and corpsmen receive meets the standard of the U.S. military, it should be good enough for the State of Texas.

The fast-track 12-month degree program at Texas Tech addresses three critical needs:

- **Creating career paths** for returning veterans;
- **Educating more Texans** to address the nationwide nursing shortage;
- **Improving care for our veterans** by working with clinical partners in the VA health care system.



“Rivalries exist, but competition raises rankings—and our premier colleges and universities are working toward a singular goal: educating the future leaders of America.” Governor Abbott visiting with The University of Texas Longhorn Band in Austin. Signing the game-changing Governor’s University Research Initiative. Adopting Aggie spirit on the sidelines at Texas A&M University’s Kyle Field.

Serving those who served

America is the greatest force for freedom the world has ever known

because of those who wear the uniform of the U.S. Armed Forces. They have been there to serve us; it is our turn to serve them.

► **RELATED NEWS:**

[Governor Abbott Orders National Guard To Carry Guns On Base](#)

[Office Of Governor Awards \\$15 Million To Texas Military Installations](#)

Texans have long played a powerful role in defending this nation. Many have served, and many more have trained and lived on military installations in this state.

Today, Texas is the proud home to almost 2 million veterans, active duty military, reserve and National Guard members and their families.

■ **So important is the military's** role in Texas, one of the first pieces of legislation I signed into law as governor was the Stolen Valor Bill increasing the penalty for presenting a fraudulent military record in Texas.

■ **No veteran should wait in line** for care. I called on Congress to pass legislation adding in-patient and urgent care facilities at the VA Health Care Center in Harlingen, and I offered The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine and its 15,000-square-foot Smart Hospital complex as a force multiplier.

■ **To help our military heal their** deepest wounds, mental health and family support services will be offered locally in partnership with private providers.

■ **And because Texas is home to** more women veterans than any state, a Women Veterans Program has been created to improve access to benefits.

As our veterans transition to civilian life, we've also made it easier for them to open a business and create new jobs in Texas.

■ **Occupational license and exam** fees are now waived for veterans with the required education, training and practical experience.

■ **New veteran-owned businesses** are now exempt from franchise taxes for the first five years.

Finally, we were often reminded this year that our freedom is not free. On behalf of all Texans, I was privileged to:

■ **Declare Feb. 2 Chris Kyle Day** in honor of his service and that of his comrades in arms who have long defended our great nation;

■ **Attend the Purple Heart** ceremony at Fort Hood for victims of the 2009 terrorist attack;

■ **Award the Lone Star Medal of** Valor to retired Marine Sgt. Ronnie Reininger;

■ **Present Texas Legislative** Medals of Honor to the families of U.S. Army Lt. Col. Ed Dyess and U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer Chris Kyle;

■ **Present Texas Purple Hearts** to Texas National Guard members injured while serving.

As Texans, as Americans, we must recommit to serve all of those who have served.

“It is our duty to honor those whose **sacrifice has preserved our freedom.”**



Governor Abbott presenting a Texas Purple Heart to Pfc. Jose Romo of Pasadena, one of four Texas National Guard members injured in September by an improvised explosive device while serving in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Presenting a Texas Legislative Medal of Honor for Chief Petty Officer Chris Kyle to his widow Taya Kyle. Meeting with members of the Greatest Generation outside the Texas Capitol following the 2015 Veterans Day parade.

Protecting against known and unknown threats

It is imperative for the state to fulfill its most solemn responsibility:

protecting the safety of our citizens and communities while respecting individual rights and civil liberties.

► **RELATED NEWS:**

[Governor Abbott Directs DFPS To Implement New Child Safety Measures](#)

[Governor Abbott Releases Texas Homeland Security Strategic Plan](#)

[Governor Abbott Announces State Refugee Act With Senator Ted Cruz](#)

Keeping Texans safe from threats to our security—whether from within our communities or from across the border—is my top priority.

BORDER SECURITY REPORT

■ **I warned the U.S. Department of Homeland Security** in September about the significant increase in unaccompanied minors once again pouring across our border and challenging Texas' security and resources.

■ **The federal government** compounded its negligence by failing to give advance notice so state and local governments could prepare for the administration's unilateral decision to relocate thousands of foreign nationals in Texas.

ENFORCING SECURITY

As governor, I will not allow our porous border to go undefended. That is why we took these measures this legislative session:

■ **We have nearly doubled border security funding** to approximately \$800 million.

■ **We are accelerating the hiring** of 250 additional DPS troopers for the border region.

■ **We're providing additional training and equipment** for border security and enforcement.

■ **And we are giving prosecutors** across the state more tools to crack down on criminal enterprises involved in human trafficking and drug smuggling.



“Texas is strong. When we work together, we’re even stronger.” Honoring fallen officers at the 2015 DPS Peace Officer Memorial Service. Governor Abbott signing Kari’s Law requiring direct dial of 9-1-1 from multi-line telephones. Briefing the public on state resources dispatched to disaster areas.

“All of the men and women who protect and serve,
and the families who stand by their side,
deserve our deepest respect. They are the best of Texas.”

Governor Abbott’s remarks at the Star of Texas Awards, September 2015

■ **To stop the reach of gangs into** our communities and schools, we’re expanding the Texas Anti-Gang Program across the state.

■ **And all state agencies are now** required to use E-verify when hiring new employees.

I am also taking the following actions as governor to respond to the federal government’s inaction:

■ **Extending National Guard troop** deployments at strategic locations on the border;

■ **Increasing the number of boats** and tactical officers at strategic locations on the Rio Grande River, coordinating Texas Department of Public Safety and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department resources;

■ **Instructing DPS to increase** aerial observation missions to aid interdiction efforts;

■ **Awarding grants to the Border** Prosecution Unit and to local law enforcement in the border region;

■ **And again urging Homeland** Security to increase U.S. Border Patrol agents in Texas.



“As the people of Texas and across America are enjoying their Christmas holiday, they do so under the blanket of freedom you help to protect for this state and this nation every single day.” Governor Abbott sharing his thanks with Texas National Guard troops and their families in Weslaco during the holiday season.

Finally, to ensure compliance with the rule of law and the safety of all Texas communities:

■ **Any sheriff’s department that** does not fully honor detention requests from Immigration and Customs Enforcement will not be eligible for grants from my office’s Criminal Justice Division.

■ **I supported the Texas attorney** general’s decision to sue the federal government to stop the resettlement of any Syrian refugees because the federal government does not have the necessary security screening precautions in place.

■ **And I am working with** Congress on the State Refugee Security Act giving governors tools to reject resettlements until security screening improves.

PREPARING COMMUNITIES

We are also helping communities prepare for threats and hazards that pose the greatest risk.

■ **We are awarding \$57 million in** homeland security preparedness grants to jurisdictions across the state for security planning, organization, equipment, training and exercises.

INCREASING PROTECTION

To provide more protection for the most vulnerable in our society, we:

- **Awarded \$165 million in** criminal justice and victim services grants to local law enforcement agencies, domestic violence shelters, child sex-trafficking victims programs and other governmental and nonprofit agencies across Texas;

- **Strengthened Texas law** against human smuggling;

- **United law enforcement,** prosecutors, medical professionals and victim advocates at the local level by creating Domestic Violence High-Risk Teams;

- **Increased funding for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners** and for DNA testing of sexual assault kits;

- **Made the online solicitation** of a minor a punishable offense;

- **Created civil and criminal** liability for “revenge porn,” the disclosing of sexually explicit

images of a former partner without consent;

- **And we are doing more to** address the tragedy of child sex trafficking by building programs to provide statewide coordination of prevention activities and wrap-around care for young survivors.

PROTECTING LAW ENFORCEMENT

To more adequately protect our law enforcement officials from acts of retaliation:

- **The dissemination of certain** personal information of peace officers or their family members is now an offense for interference with public duties.

DISASTER RESPONSE REPORT

This was a challenging year as families and businesses across the state faced devastating fires, flooding, blizzards and tornadoes.

We mourn deeply the loss of life. We look for lessons learned. And we will rebuild for the future.

- **Disaster declarations were** issued for counties across the state to activate emergency management plans and to help secure federal recovery funds.

- **And at the state level, we will** continue to assist with challenges faced from the flooding in Wimberley and beyond, to the fires in Bastrop County, the severe winter weather in West and North Texas and the tornadoes that hit across the state.

I want to thank our dedicated first responders and local officials on the ground as well as all Texans for heeding warnings about the dangers posed and for rushing in to help family, friends and neighbors in the long recovery.

SPOTLIGHT: FIRST RESPONDERS

In September, I had the privilege of honoring 28 true Texas heroes and meeting their families at the Star of Texas Awards recognizing first responders killed or injured in the line of duty.

Those who are first to respond, to provide comfort and safety, to save lives at costs unknown, that is a special calling only the best can answer.

I also called for a moment of silence on September 4 at 11 a.m. to honor the service of Harris County Deputy Darren Goforth, who was so cowardly murdered. Officers on patrol around the state also turned on their vehicles' flashing lights.

The moment served as a reminder: For our law enforcement officers to stand in front of us and all that threatens, we must stand behind them.



“Respect and pride in our law enforcement must be restored in this state and nation.” Governor Abbott inviting law enforcement officers and Texans around the state to pause for a moment of silence on September 4 honoring Harris County Deputy Darren Goforth.

Preserving our freedoms

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—these are more than just words.

These are the story of America, of why we believe in America.

► **RELATED NEWS:**

[Texas Eliminates Taxpayer Funding To Planned Parenthood](#)

[Governor Greg Abbott And First Lady Cecilia Abbott Receive Dignity In Life Award](#)

[Governor Abbott Sends Letter To BLM Director Over Federal Land Grab](#)

I'm proud that no state does more to preserve, protect and defend our God-given rights.

PRESERVING LIFE

We made significant strides this session in further protecting innocent life and the health and safety of vulnerable Texans.

■ **Pregnant minors are now more** safeguarded from exploitation in the judicial system.

■ **Texans nearing the end of life** have new protections for continuing care.

■ **Alternatives to Abortion** program funding has been increased to \$18 million.

■ **And Texas Women's Health** Program funding has been increased by \$50 million to provide more women with access to family planning services and annual exams at no cost.

In the wake of the videos exposing horrific abortion clinic practices, my LIFE Initiative called for immediate and ongoing action:

■ **We must make partial-birth** abortion a felony in Texas; it must also be illegal for doctors to risk a woman's health by altering abortion procedures to preserve fetal body parts.

■ **We must expand adoption** services and increase support for children and families at risk of abuse and neglect.

■ **Taxpayer funding must be** eliminated completely for any abortion provider in Texas.

■ **And we must criminalize any** sale or transaction of fetal body parts or tissue in Texas by an abortion clinic for any purpose.

PRESERVING LIBERTY

Because Texans must be secure in the knowledge that our religious freedom is beyond the reach of government or coercion by the courts:

■ **I signed the Pastor Protection** Act ensuring clergy cannot be forced to violate their sincerely held religious beliefs.

■ **I instructed all state agencies** to never pressure individuals or organizations into violating their First Amendment rights.

■ **I supported the right of local** governments to publicly display Nativity scenes and defended the right of law enforcement in Texas to display the national motto, "In God We Trust," on their patrol cars.

And I'm proud we expanded liberty in Texas:

■ **Licensed Texans can openly** carry a holstered handgun in public.

■ **And licensed Texans can carry** concealed handguns on public higher education campuses beginning August 2016.

**“Texas will continue to lead the nation
in protecting **innocent life.**”**



Governor Abbott gathering with state leaders and pastors from across Texas for the signing of the Pastor Protection Act preserving religious liberty. Hosting a ceremonial signing of a pro-life reform of the Texas Advanced Directives Act. Expanding Texans' Second Amendment rights at the open carry bill signing.

Growing from the strength of our people

Texas is and has always been an exceptional state.

Like America's place in the world, Texas stands out among the states as a model for strength, individual liberty and economic opportunity.

The power of the Texas model comes not from the strength of our government, but from the strength of our people.

Here are some of the extraordinary everyday Texans we've been privileged to celebrate who make our state the envy of the nation.

■ **At 109 years old, Richard Overton is a Texas treasure.**

In 1942, Richard enlisted in the U.S. military and served honorably in the Pacific Theater, defending our nation at the height of World War II.

Richard is a lifelong Texan and resides in the same home he purchased in Austin after returning from the battlefield.

When asked about the key to his long life, he responded in true Texas form:

"You have to ask God about that. He brought me here and He's taking care of me, and nothing I can do about it. I can talk about what He's doing for me."

Today, Richard is the second-oldest living World War II veteran in the U.S.

■ **Archer Hadley represents the best of true Texas grit.**

Born with cerebral palsy, Archer has sought assistance opening doors his entire life. But as a senior at Austin High School, he

decided to open his own doors, raising over \$87,000 to install automatic door openers on campus.

With a big dream and the determination to achieve it, Archer rose above the challenges he faced and proved that Texans—despite all obstacles—can do anything they set their minds to.

"It just takes an idea and the guts to strive for it," he said at the unveiling of the new doors.

Archer is now a student at The University of Texas, and I proudly appointed him to the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities in September.

■ **Ten-year-old Savannah Solis of Tyler made it her duty to give back**

to those who keep her and her family safe each and every day: our law enforcement community.

She made it her goal to speak for her generation, writing countless letters to law enforcement professionals across the country saying: We love and respect our police officers.

Savannah delivered a letter to me, and I shared her powerful message with the Texas Police Chiefs Association in March.

Amid national scrutiny and criticism of law enforcement, Savannah's message is an important reminder that we owe

eternal thanks to the men and women who put their lives on the line protecting our communities.

■ **Lewisville firefighter Andy Allison ran to the rescue**

of a homeowner and wound up needing to be rescued himself.

Battling a house fire, he was driven to his knees as water from his hose came in contact with a live wire. The electrocution trauma was brutal and will challenge Andy the rest of his life.

Through two long years of burn treatments, surgeries and physical therapy, Andy says it is his wife, Amanda, who is the real hero for him and their two young sons.

Andy was one of the 28 first responders honored at the 2015 Star of Texas Award ceremony. By their service and sacrifice, they have allowed Texas to continue to shine as the Lone Star of our great nation.

■ **Charmane Sellers is more than just a businesswoman**, she is a Texan with a unique vision and passion for helping those in need.

As president and CEO of Aleon Properties, Inc., Charmane provides construction services for disabled Texans.

Both the Greater Austin Black Chamber of Commerce and the Governor's Small Business Forum have honored Charmane for her innovative work in remodeling and construction projects that help businesses comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act in a cost-effective manner while also

providing individualized services for residential properties.

"We want to make sure we provide a quality product that will last long after we've gone," Charmane said.

A 100 percent veteran- and woman-owned firm, Aleon Properties is improving the lives of everyday Texans under Charmane's inspiring leadership.

TOURING TEXAS

Not all of the answers are found within the walls of the Texas Capitol. It is in our small towns and big cities where the secret to our state's success lives: the hardworking people of Texas.

My first visit as governor was to the Rio Grande Valley, a region poised for the greatest growth. And while I frequently attended events in our dynamic big cities, it was often in traveling to the small town downtowns, in talking to civic and business groups and in meeting with everyday Texans where I learned the most about the bright future for Texas.

■ **Small town stops included:** Bastrop, Bryan, College Station, Galveston, Grapevine, Kilgore, Killeen, Lake Jackson, Longview, Lubbock, McKinney, Mt. Pleasant, Palestine, Pflugerville, Schertz, Smithville, Weslaco, West, Wichita Falls and Wimberley.

■ **And I was honored to speak** with business chambers, students and teachers, law enforcement and military associations and many other groups across the state and throughout the year.

APPOINTMENTS

Because ours is a representative citizen government, my appointments team is constantly on the lookout for the most talented and qualified individuals to serve our state.

■ **Over 400 appointments were** made in 2015 to state boards, commissions, councils and other roles. The majority of these are volunteer positions, and I am grateful to those outstanding Texans for their service.

CONSTITUENT CONTACTS

Finally, I enjoyed the many conversations with you in my first year as governor. These included more than 150,000 calls, emails and letters, plus social media contacts online:

■ **Total social media impressions**
26,247,261 Facebook
5,845,506 Twitter
75,122 YouTube views

■ **Tweet you engaged with most** RT if you're excited [#BlueBellisBack](#) in #Texas.

■ **Post you "Liked" most** #Texas Governor's Mansion illuminated blue for [Law Enforcement Appreciation Day](#).

■ **Post you engaged with most** Today I sent a letter to President Obama informing him Texas will not accept any [Syrian refugees](#).

■ **Most viewed video** Governor Greg Abbott Unveils [Texas Plan](#)

“True strength of character is revealed when tested by adversity.”



“We’ve seen again and again the extraordinary resilience and strength of character of our Texas family.” Governor Abbott presenting a Star of Texas Award to Lewisville firefighter Andy Allison and his newborn son. Opening the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Dallas. Celebrating WWII veteran Richard Overton’s 109th birthday in the Governor’s Mansion.

Making the future even brighter



**As First Lady,
I am so honored to
serve the people
of Texas.**

**► MORE FROM
THE FIRST LADY'S BLOG:**

[Visiting Van](#)

[Helping Our Fellow Texans](#)

[Growing In The Garden](#)

[Touring The Governor's Mansion](#)

As Texans, we are all family. I learned that from a very early age growing up the daughter of two teachers in San Antonio.

My family was my church, my neighborhood and my entire community. We looked after one another and tried to take care of those in need.

That's why I became a teacher and a principal.

Who could have guessed where that path would lead—by my husband's side as he serves as the 48th governor of Texas.

It is such a joy to travel across this great state to celebrate our many blessings. I invite you to read a few favorite posts from my blog about the Texans I've met who are making the future even brighter.

■ Honoring Volunteers

Greg and I hosted an awards ceremony at the Governor's Mansion celebrating the 2015 Governor's Volunteer Awards.

With the help of the OneStar Foundation, we honored nine awardees from across Texas for their significant contributions to their communities and their fellow Texans.

I believe we are each called to service, and these philanthropic Texans have enthusiastically

answered that call. We are appreciative of their service and thankful that they are sharing so much of themselves to help their fellow Texans succeed.

■ Exceeding Limits

In Houston I attended a Governor's Small Business Forum titled "Women Exceeding Limits." I was pleased to present the 2015 Governor's Small Business Awards and honor all of the recipients.

Texas is the best state for business, and women have been leaders of that success. Women-owned businesses are crucial to our economy and play a key role in the future of Texas.

Congratulations to the winners, and thank you for all that you do to make Texas the model for doing business.

■ Visiting Wimberley

Just weeks after the deadly flood along the Blanco River, Greg and I visited Wimberley. We were there to support the local economy and spread the word that while this town and its residents sustained heavy damage from the recent flood, Wimberley has bounced back and is open for business.

We had the opportunity to meet many locals who exhibited such strength and pride in their town. And I was so glad to have met

Texans from all across our state who were visiting Wimberley to shop and support the community as well as several Red Cross volunteers who were there to help with the ongoing recovery.

While there is still work to be done, there's no doubt this community is #WimberleyStrong.

■ **Defending Innocent Life**

The St. John Paul II Life Center in Austin awarded Greg and me their 2015 Dignity in Life Award, and we were truly honored. I attended the 5th Annual Benefit Dinner and accepted the award on our behalf.

With the steadfast commitment of partners like the St. John Paul II Life Center, we will continue to vigorously defend and protect innocent life in Texas.

■ **Celebrating Communities**

I had the privilege of visiting Ennis and Rosenberg for the Texas Historical Commission Texas Main Street Program's First Lady's Tour.



Governor Abbott and the First Lady welcoming Governor's Volunteer Award winners to a reception at the Governor's Mansion.

Since 1981, every Texas First Lady has participated in this special tour celebrating and welcoming the new communities designated as official Texas Main Street cities, and it was my pleasure to continue this grand tradition.

From our busy urban centers to our treasured small towns, it is in

our downtowns where the past, present and future meet and a sense of community grows.

Thank you to Ennis and Rosenberg—and cities and towns all across the Lone Star State—for helping to make Texas such an extraordinary place to call home.



The First Lady honoring the Governor's Small Business Award winners in Houston. Accepting the 2015 Dignity in Life award. With Governor Abbott and Pancake, the First Puppy and official greeter at the Governor's Mansion.

The Texas Plan: In defense of our liberties

As Americans, the U.S. Constitution provides us with the ultimate defense of our liberties.

Without the protection of the rule of law, all that we treasure can be taken away by mere whim.

► **VIDEO LINKS:**

[Governor Abbott Unveils Texas Plan](#)

The increasingly frequent departures from constitutional principles in our nation's capital are destroying the very foundation on which this country was built.

We are succumbing to the caprice of man that our founders fought to escape. The cure to these problems will not come from Washington, D.C. Instead, the states must lead the way.

To do that I am adding another item to the agenda for our next legislative session in Texas.

I want legislation authorizing Texas to call for a convention of states.

Dysfunction in Washington, D.C., stems largely from the federal government's refusal to follow the U.S. Constitution.

Congress routinely violates its enumerated powers while taxing and spending its way from one financial crisis to another.

The president exceeds his executive powers with heavy-handed regulations.

And the Supreme Court imposes its policy views under the guise of judicial interpretation.

To restore the rule of law in America, I offer these nine constitutional amendments:

1. Prohibit Congress from regulating activity that occurs wholly within one state.

2. Require Congress to balance its budget.

3. Prohibit administrative agencies—and the unelected bureaucrats that staff them—from creating federal law.

4. Prohibit administrative agencies—and the unelected bureaucrats that staff them—from pre-empting state law.

5. Allow a two-thirds majority of the states to override a U.S. Supreme Court decision.

6. Require a seven-justice super-majority vote for U.S. Supreme Court decisions that invalidate a democratically enacted law.

7. Restore the balance of power between the federal and state governments by limiting the former to the powers expressly delegated to it in the Constitution.

8. Give state officials the power to sue in federal court when federal officials overstep their bounds.

9. Allow a two-thirds majority of the states to override a federal law or regulation.

I invite you to read my full plan and share your ideas at gov.texas.gov. And I encourage you to contact your state legislators.

"We the People" must restore the rule of law to ensure greater opportunity for all.

**“For too long
Washington has tried
to remake America
in its image.**

In **Texas**,
we offer a **different** approach.
We don't put our trust in government.
We put our **trust in the people**.

And I will make sure
we keep it that way.”

Because of you, Texas is No. 1 in the nation.

Advanced Placement District: Irving ISD is the National AP District of the Year for mid-sized districts, College Board

Agricultural: Texas is #1 in cattle, cotton, hay, sheep, goats, wool and mohair production.

Best City for STEM Grads: Houston is #1, Austin is No #4, Business Insider

Best City for Young Entrepreneurs: Austin is #1, Midland is #8, NerdWallet.com

Best City to Start a Career: Austin is #1, Houston is #6, Dallas is #10, Hubspot.com

Best State for Business: Texas is #1, Chief Executive, 11th year in a row

Best State to Make a Living In: Texas is #1, Forbes and MoneyRates.com

Business Climate: Texas is #1, Business Facilities

Capital Investments: Texas is #1, 6th year since 2004, Site Selection

Economic Climate: Texas is #1, Forbes

Economic Clout of Women Business Owners: San Antonio is #1, Houston is #3, Dallas is #9, American Express

Exports: Texas is #1, 14th year in a row

Farming/Ranching: Texas is #1 in the number of farms and ranches with 248,800 covering 130.2 million acres and more women- and minority-owned farm operations.

Fastest Growing Cities: Houston is #1, Austin is #2, Dallas is #3, Fort Worth is #8, San Antonio is #10, Forbes

Fastest Growing Economies, Overall: Odessa is #1, Frisco is #2, Midland is #3, Mission is #4, College Station is #5, Killeen is #6, Bryan is #8, Austin is #9, Round Rock is #10, WalletHub.com

Fastest Growing Economies of Large Cities: Austin is #1, Fort Worth is #3, Corpus Christi is #5, Houston is #10, WalletHub.com

Fastest Growing Economies of Mid-Size Cities: Odessa is #1, Frisco is #2, Midland is #3, College Station is #4, Killeen is #5, Round Rock is #7, McKinney is #8, WalletHub.com

Fastest Growing Economies of Small Cities: Mission is #1, Bryan is #2, Edinburg is #3, Pharr is #5, Allen is #6, WalletHub.com

Industrial Development: Texas is #1, NAIOP Research Foundation

Infrastructure: Texas is #1, Business Facilities

Investments, Foreign and Domestic: Texas is #1, IBM's 2015 Global Location Trends

Job Growth, Private-Sector: Texas is #1 over the last 10 years, BLS

Oil and Gas Production: Texas is #1

Population Growth: Texas is #1 for population growth, 2000-2014, U.S. Census

Small Business Friendliness: Texas is #1, Thumbtack.com

Tech Job Leaders: Austin is #1, Houston is #4, Business Facilities

Top Cities for Startups: Austin is #1, Houston is #8, San Antonio is #10, Business Facilities

Top High School in the U.S.: School for the Talented and Gifted in Dallas is #1, School of Science and Engineering Magnet in Dallas is #5, Carnegie Vanguard High School in Houston is #6, Lamar Academy in McAllen is #10, U.S. News

Wind and Natural Gas Growth: Texas is #1, FuelFix.com



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